1: McIlwraith E-5 (1922-1924) 1948
NE6 Bellacoola NE6

* 556 574 [203] Although guests from different tribes are sometimes invited to other ceremonials, it is at potlatches that they are essential. Since the validity of such transactions as marriages, divorces, or the assumption of professional prerogatives depends on the presence of witnesses, and since the importance of such a rite depends on the number of witnesses, a man is always eager to carry out any public performance at a potlatch when he is sure of the attention of foreigners, and the consequent wider diffusion of knowledge of what he has done. The man who has invited guests is usually willing to allow others to perform at his potlatch, since it increases the complexity and importance [184] of the affair. It follows that no two potlatches are alike; one will contain features entirely lacking in another. Moreover, the wealth of the donor determines how many rites he himself will cause to be performed. The fundamental concept of the potlatch is the inviting of guests from abroad to witness rites [769] in connection with an ancestral myth, especially the return of a recently deceased relative of the donor to visit the living.

* 556 796 At any important potlatch the following rites are carried out, and in the account of the ritual it will be assumed that these alone are taking place. If the reader bears this summary in mind, he is less likely to be confused by the complication of rites.

(1) The return of a dead ancestor to visit the living.

[575] [553] (2) The initiation of young men or women into the *sisaok* society. This includes the validation of a *sisaok* name for each, and a period of seclusion in the back-room. The initiates may either be relatives of the donor of the potlatch, or young persons whose relatives are taking the opportunity to carry out the rite in the presence of foreigners. Some of the initiates may already be members of the society, undergoing a further period of seclusion in order to increase their status by a further distribution of presents.

[554] [858] [583] (3) The payment by the wife of the donor and her family of goods to "rebuy" her from her husband. This is a legal fiction, though necessary to maintain the status of the children.

1:McIlwraith E-5 (1922-1924)1948
NE6 Bellacoola NE6

the most *human* of all substances, and, therefore, a potent protection against supernatural beings. It is valuable as a defence against evil monsters, but it is equally deadly to shamans and other human beings with supernatural powers. In the distant past, Raven taught mankind that to sleep with a menstruating woman would so blind a man that he would be unsuccessful in hunting. The belief is that animals, knowing everything that takes place, avoid one who is so unclean. One old man mentioned that he had failed to obey this injunction and considered his loss of virility as a punishment, overlooking the fact that he was over seventy years of age.

The coming of adolescence in a boy is recognized by change in voice and the other usual indications. He is neither taboo nor unclean, and consequently does not have to undergo any restrictions on his actions. There is no ceremony to mark the entry of a youth into adult membership of the tribe; instead, this comes gradually and puberty is no more than an indication of increasing age and strength.

Marriage

Like most so-called "primitive" peoples, the Bella Coola regard the married state as the normal condition of man. Anyone unwilling to wed is considered unnatural. Since the number of the sexes is approximately equal, the only persons forced to live alone are elderly widows and widowers, and those crippled, either mentally or physically. Such individuals are looked upon as unfortunate; in fact, they have failed in one of the most fundamental of life's struggles. Man provides fish and game, builds houses and canoes, while woman collects berries, makes baskets, cooks, and performs the multitudinous small household tasks.

"Is it not to the benefit of each to marry?" say the Bella Coola.

Marriage is not a mere economic arrangement, nor is its sole function to regulate relations between the sexes. Its most important feature is that it governs the status of the child.

1: McIlwraith E-5 (1922-1924) 1948
NE6 Bellacoola NE6

581 Confidently believing that he has descended from ancestors [858] who came to this earth in the beginning of time, a Bella Coola wishes to have his children firmly established in the path of his forbears. This can be accomplished only with the aid of a suitable mother. It follows that marriage is not primarily a matter of affection, but of the ancestral eligibility of the contracting parties.

CHOICE OF MATE

584 Since the initiative for marriage is taken by the man in 581 almost all cases, it will be convenient and proper to describe the factors which enter into the search for a wife, remembering that the converse govern the decision of the woman and her relatives. The choice of the woman who is to be the mother of the children who will carry on the traditions of the ancestral family is a matter of too great importance to be entrusted to any young person. Accordingly, while their son is yet a child, his parents often discuss who would be a suitable wife for him. They view the matter from a strictly business standpoint. 581 Proud of their own ancient lineage, they would not demean themselves by allowing their son to marry a girl who could not trace her ancestry back to the first people, or with one whose forbears had disgraced themselves by marriage with slaves. Instead, it is a matter of pride for parents to have as daughter-in-law the child of a powerful chief. Nor can they choose a 582 woman too closely related to their son. Marriage with a sister, an aunt, a niece, or any first cousin is strictly prohibited. No reason for these laws could be obtained; the Bella Coola consider that it would be "indecent" or unclean so to marry, but have theorized no further about the matter. An adopted child [597] is regarded in the same light as an own child. The Bella Coola [829] know, and are amused by, the regulation of marriage according [171] to crests among the northern tribes, but practise nothing of the same nature themselves. In fact, marriages usually take place among those who are descended from one ancestor and who have, accordingly, the same crest, though the significance

1:McIlwraith E-5 (1922-1924)1948
NE6 Bellacoola NE6

dances in time to it. Using their own discretion, the musicians proceed to beat out the time for *kusiut* after *kusiut*, and each performs. In like fashion they then beat out the tune of one *susaok* after another, and each member of that society gives his dance. Since none of the supernatural beings is present, the affair is non-sacred. The singers consult with the host as to the number of songs to be used. When they stop at last, X's father, aided by his younger relatives, gives valuable presents of food. No mention of the coming marriage is made, but the rite gives the donor an opportunity of displaying his generosity as a chief and indirectly increases the importance of the wedding because the value of the food will later be remembered in connection with it.

If X's father is very wealthy, he may recall the people for several nights, always providing the same type of entertainment, and always giving food. He uses his own judgment as to the number of such entertainments, but at that which he decides shall be the last, he announces:

"Tomorrow we shall go to Y's father's house."

If X's father does not wish to give away such large quantities of food he may omit the dancing in his own house and make this announcement at a potlatch, a *kusiut* dance,[1] or any other public gathering. But the more elaborate the ceremonial, the greater is the importance of the marriage in the eyes of the Bella Coola, which in turn increases the strength of the children who may result from it.

On the morning after this declaration, X's father calls to his house those whom he wishes to be witnesses of the alliance that has been planned. These include as many of his relatives and those of his wife as he desires, and often intimate friends. These individuals comprise the group interested, on behalf of X, in the marriage; they provide the goods which are given for him, and receive the presents from the corresponding group of Y's relatives. Anyone having the necessary financial ability

[1] This is probably a recent innovation.

1: McIlwraith E-5 (1922-1924)1948
NE6 Bellacoola NE6

than the presents just given by X's relatives, though occasionally they may exceed them. Y's father, or a herald, or an eloquent friend on his behalf, speaks to the following effect: 583 584

"Be bold. Henceforth you will have to work a very long time for us. We will let you know when we need your services."

The significance of this speech lies in the fact that X, and to a certain extent his relatives, are expected to perform almost menial tasks for Y's father during the period of engagement, which has now been duly ratified. X's father and his followers now leave Y's house. It is immaterial whether or not X and Y themselves have been present. It is important that this formal acknowledgment of the engagement should take place during the day; otherwise any children resulting from the marriage could be shamed by having it said to them: "Your parents were not married in the open light of day." [858]

For a varying length of time X now acts almost as a servant to Y's father. He does not live with her family, but he cuts wood, draws water, and performs other menial tasks. Whenever a member of X's family gives a ceremony, he takes care to give lavish presents to Y's relatives. If it is impossible to hold a sacred rite, X's father is at least expected to invite Y's family to a ceremonial feast, and also to share with them any game that he may kill. Meanwhile, X and Y are not subject to any restrictions as to seeing each other. In theory if they should cohabit it would "spoil" the engagement, but in most cases when this occurs, as it often does, the matter is simply hushed up. [836]

Children whose parents were long engaged are said to be "heavy"; their entry into life having been prepared with careful thought and due ceremony, so that their limbs are clear to travel with success to the position of chief. When such a child is born, the relatives are eager to call their fellow-villagers to confer a name soon after birth, and the infant starts life with this advantage. There is no specific length of time for engagements; if X and Y are the children of influential chiefs, the 584 [858] [553]

1:McIlwraith E-5 (1922-1924) 1948
NE6 Bellacoola NE6

584 as soon as possible. Though strictly legal, and commonly practised even long ago, this is not considered a desirable preliminary, since the children lack the strength which would have been theirs if their parents had been long engaged. In recent
178 years the custom of short engagements has become popular,
584 though the older Bella Coola feel resentment, saying that the woman is simply "bought" with goods or money at the actual wedding. The return of such sums in due course does not compensate for the omission of the lengthy period of engagement. A few years ago a powerful chief even "bought" husbands for his grand-daughters. His influence was so great that by bestowing large sums on the families of the youths they accepted the young women as wives. The girls in question were desirable in every way, according to Bella Coola standards, but by marrying without a long engagement and suitable presents the husbands, and their families, failed to live up to the dignity of their ancestry. These are breakings down of the ancient rites, and as such are lamented by the older people.

583 Sometimes, despite the wishes of their parents, a boy and
584 girl announce their desire to marry by living together. After much storming, the parents usually decide to make the best of a bad business by performing the marriage rites as soon as possible and by lavish expenditure on them to lessen the impediment placed against the future offspring by lack of long engagement of their parents. But such a child can never be
[858] called an *ălqim*, which has the significance of something good that has long been sought for, such as a smoothed-grained tree that carpenters like. It will thus be seen that the marriage ceremony must be carried out, irrespective of whether or not it has been preceded by a lengthy period of engagement in which the first proposal was made by the boy's family, by a shorter one in which the girl's family took the initiative, or by no period of engagement whatever. These rites can now be described.

1:McIlwraith E-5 (1922-1924) 1948
NE6 Bellacoola NE6

588 mate object. Bella Coola financiers are always seeking to
556 arrange such undertakings; the potlatch is the culminating point, but the same principle pervades their whole life.

It is to the advantage of the intending donor of a potlatch to become the fictitious husband of as many children as possible. Accordingly he sometimes take the initial step, as is customary for the relatives of the husband in real marriage, but not in ceremonial. In such a case it is necessary for him to offer some inducement, perhaps in the form of one of the few women's names brought to earth in the beginning of time. He approaches a suitable father-in-law, suggesting that at a fictitious marriage he would be willing to give his wife a noble woman's name. If this is agreeable, the rite is carried out accordingly. The wife is in many cases a son of the person to
[551] whom the proposal was made; he duly receives a woman's name, the only circumstance under which this is possible. The actual designation will probably be returned through many repurchasings, but the boy has reached an enviable position. In later years he can always silence a person with whom he is quarrelling by saying:

"I need not answer you. You cannot even approach my body, so thickly am I padded with the goods which my father used when he rebought me."

556 Another business transaction of a similar nature is the
608 giving of a small infant to an old person to "hold." This ap-
858 pears to be uncommon, and the only instance about which information was available occurred under the following circumstances:

A man and a woman were married with full ceremony and the best of feelings prevailed between the two families. The wife was several times rebought until she and her relatives had fully maintained their dignity, in fact the relations of the husband felt that they were being out-shone. Then the wife's father died. To mark their sympathy, the husband's family gave the widow one of her daughter's children to "hold." Valuable non-returnable presents were transmitted as "soft

1:McIlwraith E-5 (1922-1924)1948
NE6 Bellacoola NE6

blankets" for the child. The advantages to the donors were that they had an opportunity of showing their dignity, and it would always be a mark of pride for the child to be able to boast of the way in which she had been "held."

Ceremonial marriage clearly demonstrates two strong Bella Coola characteristics; namely, the desire publicly to enter into financial undertakings to demonstrate the wealth of the contracting party, and the desire to increase the prestige of children by means of this wealth expended indirectly on their behalf.

EXTRA-MARITAL RELATIONS

Although the Bella Coola do not regard marriage primarily as a means of regulating relations between the sexes, yet the connection between the two is sufficiently close to warrant description in this chapter. A man considers intercourse as one of the normal phenomena of life: by marrying he has exclusive rights to his wife, but few moral restraints deter him from anyone else to whom he can gain access without infringing the prerogatives of some other husband. Moreover, sexual intercourse is not regarded solely as a gratification of desires; it has a significance which can be described, not inaptly, as holy. As already explained, two favourite methods of obtaining success in any undertaking are by preserving lengthy continence or by observing ceremonial chastity. If a young unmarried man or widower should wish to make use of this latter means, he is compelled to have relations with a woman to whom he has no just claims. This is universally recognized, nor is there the slightest odium attached to the man. The only essential is that he neither violate another's wife, nor force a young girl against her will.

At the present time there is great laxity in Bella Coola, a condition which makes it difficult to judge the state of affairs in former times. Every effort was made to obtain satisfactory evidence, and the following was verified and re-verified with the older men.

A wife, properly married with full ceremony, was usually

1:McIlwraith E-5 (1922-1924)1948
NE6 Bellacoola NE6

and back of the head, preventing a bulging appearance which is considered ugly, while the paintings ensure beauty of countenance. Cranial deformation has no supernatural sanction, though it is believed to have been carried out for generations. 304 789 856 [532] [826]

To Cause Leanness

Place pieces of caribou skin on an infant's wrists and ankles and leave them in position for several months. He will grow up lean and wiry, like the animal. 789 856

To Cause Left-handedness [825]

Shake the left hand of an infant while lying in the cradle and he will be left-handed throughout life. To do this is considered a malevolent action.

To Cause the Hair to Grow (two means)

(1) Rub the infant's scalp with the eye of a *Haktulk* (red cod?), freshly removed from the fish's head. [825]

(2) Boil stems of the swamp gooseberry in water and rub the mixture over the infant's scalp. [824]

Wise mothers always apply one or other of these remedies to their children.

To Cause Ability in Singing (two means)

(1) When an infant is a few months old, the parents frequently request a good singer to impart to him ability similar to his own. He takes his beating-stick, spits on it, and rubs it over the child's heart, saying: 533 789 856

"Please be a singer."

This is done only for male children. [858]

(2) Boil together herbs and a bear's bladder and smear the decoction on the infant's back. He must thenceforth wear around his neck for several months a small sack containing four blue grouse gall-bladders (possibly stones from the crop were meant). This gives the child the singing ability of the bird, but the significance of the bear bladder is unknown. [825]

1: McIlwraith E-5 (1922-1924)1948
NE6 Bellacoola NE6

To Cause Ability in Understanding the Speech of Ravens

It is well known that when ravens croak, they are really speaking, but their language is unintelligible except to one who has learnt it by means of a medicine. One of these is the following:

Catch a raven alive and cut a small piece of flesh from its body, beneath the left wing, taking care not to kill the bird. Release it, after having fed the morsel to the child. An infant so treated will grow up able to learn from ravens of the approach of raiding parties, storms, visitors, and all other news which they constantly circulate in their loud calling. It is said that the last person so endowed was the father of a Kimsquit man about forty years of age in 1922. His ability lasted throughout childhood but he lost it through infraction of a taboo.

The following medicines are used between the ages of one and two:

To Cause Long Life

One year after birth, holes are pierced through the lobes of the ears and the nasal septum. In the beginning of time, *Alquntăm* told the forefathers of the Bella Coola that if this were not done, the boy or girl would die young.

To Cause Ability in Hunting

When the umbilical cord of a female infant falls, her father places it within the knot-hole of a tree, where it is protected from rain but where it rots and is forgotten. A boy's is preserved with care. The parents wrap it in soft goat's wool and place it in the box where the father keeps his most cherished possessions; this causes the child to be careful, and to grow up with a tendency to treasure his acquisitions rather than to dispose heedlessly of them. As the first anniversary of his son's birth approaches, his father begins to observe ceremonial chastity, endeavouring to estimate the time so that its culmin-